

Filipino Remembrances of Peace Corps Volunteers

(Last fall, PCAFPD “advertised” in Fil-Am publications here in the US, inviting commentary from Filipinos who had connections with Peace Corps Volunteers over the years. We have no contact information for these RPCVs so if anyone knows their whereabouts, please let us know at Board1@rpcvphilippines.org.)

A Memorable Volunteer

In 1963 a young American lady was assigned as a Peace Corps Volunteer to our barrio, Tambuan, Town of Malinao, Province of Aklan. Her name was Elizabeth Marvin.

She had been a teacher in a suburb of Cleveland, Ohio prior to her PCV assignment. She became an instant celebrity in our town being young, pretty, and with a great personality. She loved children, and the children loved her. I was one of them. She boarded initially with my uncle, who has a house in front of the elementary school where she served as our English and Grammar teacher.

Soon, a house was built for her made of nipa and bamboo. When she moved there, we kept her company during noon breaks and after school hours. She had so many magazines and books. I got introduced to the Disney characters, as well as the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen, the books of Mark Twain, etc. Seeing how we loved books, she asked donations from the US for books, and thus started a library in our school. We named it after her, the Beth Marvin Library. She also started one in our town and a Reading Center for our barrio folks who liked to read more mature oriented materials, not the children's literature that was in our school.

Beth also got us involved in sports activities, like baseball, biking, and hiking. She got us to swim in the river and organized excursions like the one all the PCVs in Aklan did to Boracay Island. I think this was the first time Boracay was ever visited by a group of foreigners, and from there the word of mouth spread what a beautiful place Boracay is. Who knows? This may have been the event that launched Boracay as a tourist spot.

In May 1967, she returned to Malinao to wed her fiancée, a certain guy named Marinello. I heard he was in the military. (I even heard that he died in Vietnam, but when I checked the names on the Vietnam Memorial, there was no Marinello in there.) He was Catholic and she was Protestant, and she wanted to be married in our century old church, so she converted to Roman Catholicism prior to her marriage. Her mother came all the way from California to attend their wedding. The whole town was abuzz with excitement as so many Peace Corps people attended her wedding. I don't know how they got accommodated as there were no hotels in our area then. The town gave Beth a party. There was a Gala the night before her wedding. There were cultural presentations, folk dances, singing, and of course speeches! Her mom was so delighted watching the kids dance the *tinikling*! The following day was an elegant wedding, with so many of my friends and relatives in the entourage. This was followed by a "Barrio Fiesta" reception at the residence of Dr. Nelson Ibaretta. Then there was a torch parade as she went back to

our barrio, three kilometers from the town on foot (as our barrio was not accessible by cars then), with all her American friends with her, followed by all night dancing at our Barrio Hall. It was a night we will never forget.

There has never been another one like her that caught the imagination of our townspeople. When I came to the US in 1980, people from our town kept asking if I was able to communicate with Beth Marvin. I haven't had luck yet in finding her but I am still trying.

Luther R. Tamayo, MD FACP
Northport, NY

A very special Peace Corps named...Miss Marvin

I read that your organization is soliciting stories of Peace Corps in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Peace Corps in the Philippines and I can't help but respond. Just the mere mention of Peace Corps brings fond memories of a very special one named Miss Marvin. She came to our small remote town of Malinao in the province of Aklan in Panay Island in the Visayas sometime in 1964. I was only in Grade 1 then but the great things she did for our town made a tremendous impact to our lives.

My memories of her are only in bits and pieces but they are precious in every way. At that time our town had never (or had very rarely) seen a white person before so her presence alone was extra ordinary and of course when she worked very hard for the betterment of the town and its people...she became an instant celebrity....bigger than life.

I remember the time she spoke in our elementary school. We were all lined up in the school grounds, so excited to hear what the American lady had to say. She was struggling to speak our local dialect but with great determination, poise and in a very heavily accent she said... "*Magtu-on kamo it mayad agud mag ayam (aeam) kamo*". We laughed and giggled because "*ayam*" means dog in our dialect but it was tough to say "*aeam*" meaning smart. She had painstakingly learned and practiced our difficult dialect in order to connect with us. But we understood her message..."You study well and you'll be smart".

Miss Marvin put up the very first public library in our town from the books donated by the generous people of America. We were in awe to see so many books lined the shelves of this huge room specially constructed as a library. And the interesting part was we could borrow any book whenever we want (that was unheard of)! People in our town hardly owned books then. We read books in school but we couldn't take them out. There was a school library but we couldn't enter it anytime we want (books were like precious relics) and we couldn't borrow any. We go in there only as a class like a field trip. So Miss Marvin's library was a great blessing and a whole new experience for us. We started to learn English by reading "Billy & Jane" and we marveled at the pictures ...girls and boys with white skin and golden hair just like Miss Marvin! Sadly...the library did not last long when Miss Marvin left for lack of funds to maintain & man it.

And I recall her wedding! She was so loved by the people that the whole town celebrated the event. I watched the ball on the eve of the wedding as Miss Marvin, her

fiancée and their families danced the night away in the huge chamber of the Municipal Hall. It the first and the last time our town gave a ball for a wedding. It was like a grand fiesta but of course it was a grand occasion! For the wedding and the reception people donated goods...pigs, chickens, cows, rice, vegetables, fruits, etc. and divided the labor... the marketing, the cooking, the carrying of tables & chairs from the schools to the reception ground, the decorating, the before and after clean up, etc. Even children pitch in...they brought the wedding invitations door to door to every family in town, borrowed plates and silverwares for the reception, helped with the table setting, etc.

I know Miss Marvin did much, much more than my 7 year old brain could recall but for sure she touched many lives and hearts in our town. Even today the people of Malinao still remembers her with fondness and gratitude. We hope & pray she's all well.

Sincerely Yours,

Bernadette Rogan-Rynne, RN (New York)

An Excellent English Teacher

I am happy to know the golden anniversary of Peace Corps activities in the Philippines. I was 12 years old then, a first year high school student in Davao City, when they started to serve public school students.

In my third year at Davao City High School, school year 1963/1964, a very young wonderful lady Peace Corps volunteer was assigned as our English subject teacher. I clearly remember her name--Miss Nancy Harris. That was the first time that we had a Peace Corps volunteer in our class. I did not know then her qualifications as a teacher but I am grateful that she has contributed well to her students' knowledge in English and I am lucky because I belonged to the higher section. If not, I would not have had the experience of having an English teacher like her. Miss Harris was with us until our fourth year in high school and we really missed her. How I wish to hear from Miss Harris wherever she is now.

And I hope the Peace Corps program will continue its valuable service to the Filipino youth in the Philippines. Please extend my warmest congratulations to the active organizers of PCAFPD.

Nicanor Cabatuan
Queens, New York, USA

A Debt of Gratitude

My experience with a Peace Corps Volunteer in the late 60's has changed my life totally. I came from a very poor family in Alfonso, Cavite. With no money to buy food on a daily

basis, education was the least worry for my parents. My late *Ama* and my *Inay* had to work triple time to feed us and to give us what ever little things they could.

In my young mind, I had this urge to study and improve our lives, to give my parents the best life. Everyday I looked at the sky and I dreamed of reaching the clouds and to fly like an eagle in this world. But my dreams were shattered everyday I saw the poverty in our house. Then, a Peace Corps volunteer came to our quiet and little town who taught Modern Math and English. Despite being the poorest in the class, I think I was the brightest and smartest kid. I graduated Valedictorian and walked to the stage with borrowed clothes and pair of shoes. The Peace Corps Volunteer became my friend, and I shared with him my dreams. He personally tutored me in English and Math in preparation for bigger things for me in Manila and convinced my *Ama* that I needed to go to high school to harness my talents.

Everything happened according to my dreams. My Peace Corps benefactor pulled me out of my little town and brought me to Manila. He sent me to St. Theresa's College, one of the best exclusive girls' schools.

Everything is history. I graduated with a B.S. in Chemical Engineering, with MBA units, from the Ateneo. I worked for the US Department of Commerce, Manila Office, for 22 years as a Senior Commercial Specialist, traveled in Asia and the United States and migrated to the United States in 2007. I'm currently working part time as an administrative assistant to Holland Law Firm, am a paralegal student and own a small thriving consulting firm whose main business is develop US markets in Asia Pacific.

My y great success story is due to my very, very dear Peace Corps friend and brother, Mr. Robert A. Taft. I owe my success to him and I will always have a soft spot for the Peace Corps program. My ultimate dream now is to set up a small school in my little town and give education to those children who are very smart but have no resources to fulfill their dreams. I feel God is helping me a lot to fulfill this dream.

Thank you and all the best to your program for the 50th Peace Corps anniversary.

Aida Lescaño Miranda
Las Vegas, Nevada

I was a student at the Philippine Normal College from June 1962 to May 1966. Within that period there were two Peace Corps Volunteers assigned there—a Mr. McElroy who taught math and a Phil who taught science. (Sorry I have forgotten their complete names.) I was fortunate to have been under both of them. It was during the time that the so-called Modern Math was being introduced, so I had the privilege of learning it directly from an

expert. This made a big impact on my life as a teacher because wherever I taught then, I was asked to help the teachers who did not have the training in that area. More than that, I developed a love for math. I continued to learn more about it as much as I could, such that later on I became the math coordinator at our school.

I really appreciate this program of the US government because education is a big factor in the development of a nation.

Victoria Gaoat-Castillo
Los Angeles, CA

My Foster Sister

It was in 1979 when I went home after a 2 years in service-training from a 4H-Foundation based in Washington D.C. We had our formal farm training in seven springs, N. C.

Our town is in Valencia , Bohol some 42 kilometers from the city of Tagbilaran. One morning my father told me that the town doctor asked him if he could spare a room for a volunteer peace corps and as a sign of good gesture he said yes...then the days becomes excited for us...till then she came...a tall skinny lady and her name is Jill Baldwin not sure of where she came from but as far as i could remember is from Ohio...? people from our place are excited that as rumor spread around that she was my girlfriend...what a coincidence..

We came to know her as a disciplined lady, well dedicated to her calling such a very nice person...in fact she is more popular than the doctor in our town..

If time allows me to see her again that moment will be forever as long as I live

Thank so very much.

Ramon B Reyes